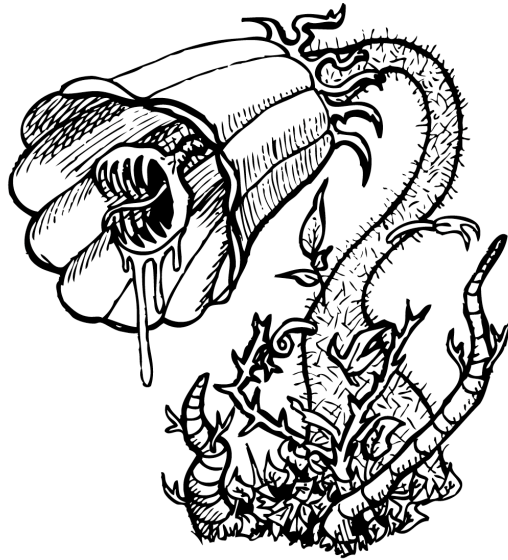


# PART II

## CHAPTER 14

### ACROSS THE HARBOUR INTO THE NEXUS OF THE STRANGE AND UNUSUAL



“AAAAAAAAA!”

The scream echoed through the whole mansion that afternoon, causing Ho Yin, Reggie, and Boyd to drop whatever tasks they’d been doing and run for the source. The source of the scream was Cindy and hearing her high-pitched, siren-wail echo through the halls of the mansion had become a common occurrence over the last three weeks.

On this day, they found her in the greenhouse, where she'd been wrapped up in several, snakelike vines that held her in place as she was examined, head-to-toe, by what appeared to be a giant, yellow flower. The flower moved as if it was trying to figure out how to digest her properly at meal time. Ho Yin, Reggie, and Boyd all burst into the greenhouse at the same time, which startled the flower.

"Pascal<sup>60</sup>!" Ho Yin said. "What do you think you're doing? Put her down!"

The large flower that went by the name of Pascal looked at Ho Yin sheepishly, its body language conveying the fact that it knew it had done something wrong. Yet it still held on to Cindy.

"*Pascal*," Ho Yin said again, this time a bit more threatening. "Do you want me to prune your leaves *again* this week?"

The flower shook its head to say no.

"Then put her down, this instant," he said.

Reluctantly, Pascal let slip its leafy, thorn-filled vines and Cindy was free. Breathing heavily, she ran behind Ho Yin for safety, peeking out from behind him to watch the killer plant. Ho Yin scolded the plant, saying, "How *dare* you, Pascal! We have been so generous with you and this is how you repay us? It just isn't fair..."

As Ho Yin lectured the giant flower in the greenhouse, Reggie took Cindy and Boyd back into the mansion. "Got yourself in a bit of a pickle, there, didn't you, lass," he said.

"It tried to kill me," she said, still trembling with fear.

"How many times are we going to have to warn you about going places you aren't supposed to go?" Reggie asked. "There are a million different ways for you to get hurt here in this mansion, Miss, and if you don't listen to our warnings, you're going to find yourself in a whole heap of trouble."

"I'm naturally curious," Cindy pleaded.

"That's what you said when the antigravity marbles<sup>61</sup> got loose," Boyd said.

"And when you used the laser to shoot a hole in the wall," Reggie said.

"So?" Cindy said.

"She doesn't listen very well," Boyd said.

At that moment, Bjorn walked out of one of the offices and Cindy grew excited, running over towards him. "They're picking on me, Bjorn," she said, looking at Boyd and Reggie as if they were somewhat evil. Bjorn huffed at the two of them as Cindy ran off down the other hallway.

Ho Yin appeared from the greenhouse just as they left, saying, "Boyd, I hope you're prepared for the day when your little sister suffers a gruesome fate in this mansion. I fear that, one day, we might not save her in time."

"Well," Boyd said, shrugging his shoulders, "I guess we'll just have to do our best."

He turned to walk back down the opposite hallway, but Ho Yin stopped him and led him back towards Mr. Ping's office. "Have you read volume thirteen yet?" he asked.

Boyd sighed and said, "I finished it this morning. Can't I have a break, Ho Yin? I've already read more in the last three weeks than I have in my whole life. Plus, I haven't even left the mansion."

"There are one hundred and three almanacs, Boyd," he said. "You have to read them all. And anyway, it's too dangerous to leave the mansion. Just continue to read the almanacs and we'll go from there. Okay?"

"All right," Boyd said. He settled into the chair and casually began thumbing through Volume 14.

"Mail's in," Reggie said as he walked past Ho Yin with a stack of envelopes and packages piled high in his arms.

"Look for my bill from the Book Society," Ho Yin said as he left the room. "I believe I owe them for this month's edition of *Chester's Quarterly*." Boyd was relaxed back in the old, rolling leather chair behind the desk with his feet propped up on the corner. When Reggie came into the room, Boyd jerked his feet off of the table as if he'd been caught doing something horribly wrong and he subtly wiped the surface of the desk with his elbow to hide the scuffs his shoes had made.

Reggie dropped the mail on the table and began to sort through it as Boyd casually wandered over to see what had been

delivered, peeking around Reggie at the bounty on the table. "Bills, bills, bills," Reggie muttered, carefully sorting through the envelopes. "Never get a credit card, Boyd. They were invented by the devil himself."

"You have a credit card?" Boyd asked.

"I have *forty-seven* credit cards," Reggie said with a sigh.

Boyd picked up one of the packages and looked at the front. "Lettuce of the Month Club?" he asked.

Reggie swiped the box from his hands and quickly opened it. "Blimey, it's here!" he said. He pulled out a wad of Styrofoam stuffing and then removed a pristine head of leafy green lettuce from a plastic bag, observing it as though it was a fine work of art. "Will you look at that?" he said. "Perfection."

"It's lettuce," Boyd said, unable to see the vegetable in quite the same way as Reggie.

"Not just *any* lettuce, Boyd," Reggie said. "It's a Winchester Laroux Third Generation head of iceberg lettuce from the south of France. It's the best of the best."

"It still looks like lettuce to me," Boyd said. "Lettuce is lettuce. You put it on burgers."

"Au contraire," Reggie said.

"I can't believe there's such a thing as the Lettuce of the Month Club," Boyd said as he began nosing through the boxes and envelopes again. A small, white box heavily wrapped in tape caught his eye and he pulled it from the pile. He looked at the address and saw his name. "Hey," he said, looking at it. "This one's for me."

In the blink of an eye, Reggie slapped the package out of Boyd's hands, across the room, and then jumped on top of Boyd as though he was protecting him. "Can't...breathe," Boyd wheezed, feeling the full weight of Reggie's bulk on top of him. Reggie gave Boyd a bit of air, but stayed over him, sniffing in the direction of the package that he'd knocked out of his hands. "What did you do *that* for?" he asked.

"Just playing it safe," Reggie said.

"By *tackling* me?" Boyd asked.

“That package,” he said. His eyes narrowed as they examined the seemingly innocuous white box on the floor. “That’s a *bad package*.”

“It’s just a box,” Boyd said.

“*From who* is the question,” Reggie said. “Nobody knows you’re here.”

“Oh,” Boyd said, and he saw the small package in a whole new way. It seemed a lot more menacing now. “Do you think it’s a bomb?”

“Bomb?” Reggie asked, slowly getting off the floor. “No, it’s not a bomb. Bombs are for stupid people. The people we’re up against aren’t stupid. Besides, I can smell bombs.”

“Well, what could it be?”

“Lots of things,” Reggie said, helping Boyd to his feet. “A piranha-bird; a pox on your firstborn; Mexican, flesh-eating jumping worms; you name it.” He began to lead Boyd out of the room, watching the box over his shoulder along the way. “Let’s keep a safe distance from it, okay? I don’t trust that thing.”

The sight of Bjorn in a bomb-disposal suit, awkwardly making his way into Mr. Ping’s office to retrieve the white package was yet another bit of the strange and unusual in a series of ever-increasing strange and unusual events that Boyd had witnessed. Bjorn looked like a giant, stiff robot when covered in the black disposal suit, which was all odd angles and sharp points, due to the protective metal plates inside the fabric. He moved like a robot as well. Boyd and Cindy watched from a safe distance down the hall behind a protective plastic shield as Reggie directed Bjorn into the office like a construction manager.

“Bjorn takes care of the dangerous objects,” Ho Yin said, holding the shield in front of Boyd and Cindy. “He’s something of a demolitions expert.”

“I don’t know what’s weirder,” Boyd said, “the fact that Bjorn is a demolitions expert or the fact that you found a bomb-disposal suit big enough to fit a polar bear.”

"He's going to be okay, isn't he?" Cindy asked. "He won't get hurt, will he?"

"He's done this hundreds of times," Ho Yin said, an air of reassurance in his voice.

"He's coming out, chaps," Reggie yelled, marching down the hall with purpose to shoo Boyd and Cindy out of the way. "Back! Back!"

Bjorn emerged from the office holding giant, six-foot steel tongs, the end of which held the infamous white package. He walked slowly, trying not to rattle the package or make any wrong moves as he took it to the laboratory at the far end of the building. As Bjorn moved on to the lab, Reggie stopped by the three of them and sighed. "Don't rightly know why that bear enjoys doing things like that, but he does," he said.

"A bomb-disposing bear," Boyd said, trying to get a handle on the situation. "What's next? Mine-detecting monkeys?"

"Actually, yes," Reggie said. "The Battling Baboons of the Eighteenth Armored Division in Britain has been doing some fine work in Angola. Have I told you their story?"

"Forget I even asked," Boyd said, shaking his head in disbelief and walking away. "This place is just too weird."

Bjorn had taken the mysterious package to a special room in the lab for dealing with volatile and dangerous items, and Cindy, Reggie, Boyd, and Ho Yin observed him through a thick window as he carefully opened up the package to examine the contents. "Now, if a horrible, green, gelatinous blob emerges from the package and starts to get bigger and bigger quite quickly, run for the car," Ho Yin said. "Those blobs can be dangerous."

"Are you joking?" Cindy asked.

"Um, no," Ho Yin said. "Don't worry, though. It's just a precaution. We haven't seen one of those in years."

Boyd and Cindy exchanged a look and continued to watch Bjorn at work. After meticulously removing the tape and cutting open the box, he slowly pulled back the sides to reveal the contents. "What is it?" Cindy asked. "I can't see it."

Boyd was standing on his toes to try to get a better look. He said, "I think it's a..."

"It's a phone," Reggie said.

They saw Bjorn lift up his protective mask, sniff the phone a couple of times, and then turn to them. He gave a "thumbs-up" sign and motioned for them to come inside the special room.

No one really knew what to make of the sleek little phone that sat on the table in front of them. It seemed innocuous enough, but then in this new world that Boyd had found himself, nothing was really harmless and he never knew when things could go awry. "So it's a phone," he said.

"Perhaps," Reggie said.

"Perhaps not," Ho Yin said.

"Well, it's not a *bomb*, right?" Boyd asked.

Reggie gave it a couple of sniffs. "No," he said. "It's not a bomb. It's definitely a phone."

Bjorn grunted a few times and nudged the phone.

"You're right, old bean," Reggie said, examining the device.

"What did he say?" Cindy asked.

"It's got some writing on the side," Reggie said. He picked it up to read it. "It says, *Property of Fang Industries.*"

"So it's from that Fang guy," Boyd said. "The one who took my parents?"

"It would seem so."

With an alarming beep, the phone rang. It's electronic tone was so loud and sharp, and everyone was so tense, that it caused them all to jump three feet off the ground. In the blink of an eye, Boyd and Cindy found themselves surrounded on all sides by Reggie, Bjorn, and Ho Yin, each one in a defensive position, ready to protect them. When they saw that there was no danger, everyone relaxed and they resumed their gaze at the ringing phone. It rang at least ten times before anyone said a word.

"Well?" Cindy asked. "Are we going to answer it?"

"It could be a trap," Reggie said.

"A trap?" Cindy asked. "It's just a phone. I think you guys are being too paranoid."

"These people are quite dangerous, Cindy," Ho Yin said. "We have to take precautions."

They stared at the phone a while longer. Finally, Cindy had enough. "Argh!" she said, grabbing the phone from the table. "It's driving me insane!"

"Cindy, wait!" Ho Yin said, but it was too late.

"Hello?" she asked. "Who is this?"

"Cindy?" asked a familiar voice on the other end of the line. "Cindy is that you?"

"Mom?" Cindy asked, shocked at the sound of her mother's voice.

"Cindy, oh, darling," her mother said. "Are you okay?"

"Mom, where are you?" Cindy asked.

Ho Yin quickly grabbed a cord and plugged the phone into a speaker so they could all hear the conversation. "Mom?" Boyd asked.

"Oh, Boyd," she said, her voice echoing through the room. "I've been so worried."

"They're in good hands, Mrs. McCloyd," Ho Yin said.

"Ho Yin!" she said. "Keep them safe."

"Mom, where are you?" Boyd asked. "Are you okay?"

"They're fine," said a voice in the room with their mother. "They're being treated quite well. I haven't hit them or anything."

"Fang," Reggie said under his breath. Boyd could hear a growl rumbling in the big yeti's chest.

"Is that the yeti?" Mr. Fang said. "Hello, you big, stupid monkey!"

"Well, it's better than being a rat like you," Reggie said.

"Hey, at least rats *taste* good," Mr. Fang laughed.

"Boyd, Cindy, everything's going to be okay," Mrs. McCloyd said into the phone. "Your father and I are fine. Don't let him..."

"Hey, Li," Mr. Fang said, interrupting Boyd's mother, "Get her out of here. She's served her purpose."

"Keep them safe, Ho Yin!" Mrs. McCloyd yelled over the sound of Li dragging her out of the room.



“Mom!” Cindy yelled, a hint of desperation in her voice.

“What do you want, Fang?” Ho Yin asked.

“You stupid man!” Cindy yelled. “Give me my Mom back!”

“Ugh!” Mr. Fang said. “That girl screeches like a boiling cat. Tell her to shut up.”

“What do you want?” Ho Yin asked again.

“Look, we’re at an impasse,” Mr. Fang said. “I want Boyd McCloyd. It’s pretty obvious I’m not going to get him with that big, ugly monkey around.”

“Rat!” Reggie said.

“Monkey!” Mr. Fang said, taunting him.

“Get to the point, Fang,” Ho Yin said.

“The point is,” Fang continued, “that I’ve got something *you* want and *you’ve* got something *I* want. Hey Boyd...do you want your parents back? You’ve got to do something for me.”

“What’s that?” Boyd asked, trying not to sound sheepish.

“Mr. Ping has lot of valuable things in his place,” Mr. Fang said. “And I want the most valuable thing in Ping Manor. The Perpetual Motion Machine.”

“What?” Boyd asked.

“Fang, you’re as crazy as you are ugly,” Reggie said. “We’re not going to give you the Perpetual Motion Machine. We don’t have it.”

“Oh, you’re lying,” Mr. Fang said. “I know you’ve got it. Mr. Pu told me you’ve got it.”

“Wang Pu has no idea what he’s talking about,” Ho Yin said. “The Perpetual Motion Machine is a myth.”

“What’s a Perpetual Motion Machine?” Boyd whispered to Reggie.

“Tell you later,” Reggie said.

“Look, you can lie to me all day long,” Mr. Fang said. “It won’t do you any good. If that stupid kid wants to see his stupid parents alive again, then he’d better get me that machine. He’s got one week to do it. If it’s not in my hands by the end of the week, his mommy and daddy are going to be on the menu at my restaurant. Got it?”

“But Fang...” Ho Yin said.



"This conversation is over," Fang yelled. "Goodbye!"

And with that, the line went dead, filling the room with silence. "That bloomin' idgit!" Reggie said, waving his arms around with anger. "The Perpetual Motion Machine! I've a right mind to go slap that Mr. Pu fellow around to teach him a lesson."

"What's the Perpetual Motion Machine?" Boyd asked.

Ho Yin looked at Reggie seriously. "We should get down to Tony Tang's. They might know what to do down there."

"Good idea, mate," Reggie said, and he quickly left the room.

"Do you think Mom and Dad are going to be okay?" Cindy asked. "Can't we just give them the machine and be done with it?"

"Well, we could if we *had* all of it," Ho Yin said. "We have several of the pieces, but we don't know if we have them all, or even how to put it together."

"Well, let's just give them what we have," Boyd said.

"I'm afraid it's not that simple," Ho Yin said.

Reggie walked back into the room with a set of car keys and said, "Get your things, Boyd. We've got to go downtown to meet some people."

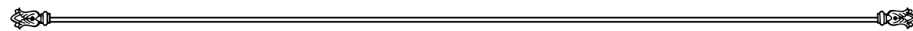
"What? Why?" Boyd asked. "What about my parents?"

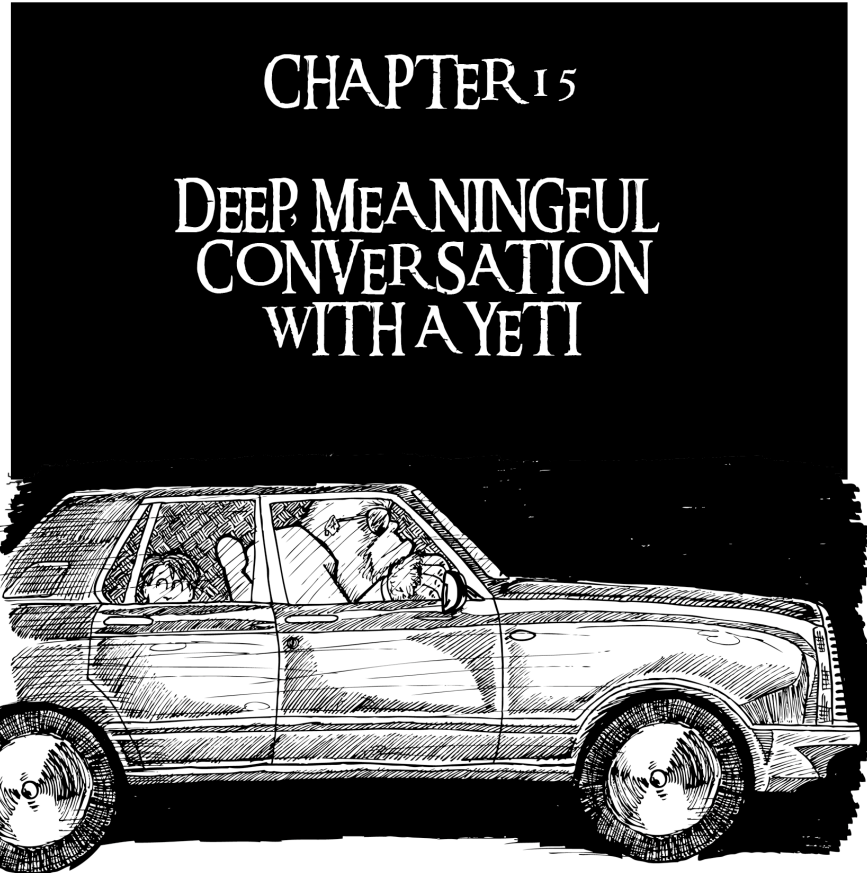
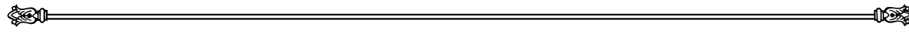
Ho Yin looked at Boyd and Cindy and said, "Trust us. We're going to do everything we can to get your parents back, but we'll need your help."

Ho Yin ran out of the room and Reggie left to bring the car around to the front of the house, leaving Boyd and Cindy in the labs with Bjorn. "I'm scared, Boyd," Cindy said. "I don't want anything to happen to Mom and Dad."

"Me neither," Boyd said. "We'll figure this out."

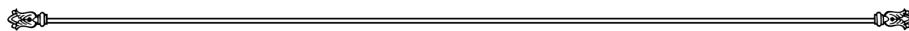
Bjorn could see that Cindy was frightened as he walked over and gave her a gentle, reassuring nudge. Cindy walked out of the room in silence with the big bear, leaving Boyd all by himself in the lab, scared, confused, and full of anxiety. It was going to be a long night.





Boyd was very nervous to be going out that night with Reggie and kept watching Stephens the Clock, waiting for six o'clock. Being the rambunctious fellow he was, Stephens made Boyd the subject of a cruel trick by forcing his hands to go backwards every other second. Eventually, Boyd figured out what was happening and threatened to put fingerprints on him if he didn't set the time back. Stephens quickly relented, as it is widely known that grandfather clocks cannot stand dust or fingerprints on their finely crafted exteriors.

"Ready to go, old bean?" Reggie asked, popping into his room wearing a plaid sweater vest and khaki knickers. He looked like he was prepared for a round of golf.



“What are you wearing?” Boyd asked.

“Stylish clothes,” Reggie said. “What? Is there something wrong with them?”

“Uh, no,” Boyd said.

“A chap likes to look sharp when he goes out on the town,” he said, straightening his sweater.

They walked out into the humid air of the Hong Kong evening when they were stopped by Ho Yin on the gravel path just before they reached the garage. “Reggie, I don’t think it’s such a good idea for the two of you to go out tonight,” he said. “The dangers are just...”

Reggie interrupted him by shooing him away with his large hand. “Tut-tut,” he said. “If it was up to you, the boy would be living in a plastic vacuum tube and eating genetically enhanced French fries. He’s not a museum piece. He’s a kid and he’s probably about to go mad-crazy sitting in this stuffy mansion all the day. Am I right, Boyd?”

“He’s right,” Boyd said. “Mad-crazy.”

Ho Yin looked as if he was swallowing a bitter pill. “Fine,” he said. “You’re right. There and back, though.”

“There and back,” Reggie said, putting on a cap that matched his knickers.

“Boyd,” Ho Yin said, turning towards him, “I want to tell you a few things before you go down there. The Temple Street Night Market<sup>62</sup> is unlike anything you’ve ever seen, not just from a weird aspect, but also from a foreign aspect as well. Some people say it’s the center of gravity for the whole of these islands, and that’s because strange and unusual things happen down there. It also means that peculiar things are drawn there as well. You’ll need to be on the lookout.”

“Cripes, Ho Yin, you’re going to give him nightmares,” Reggie said. He looked at Boyd and winked, saying, “It’s a weird place, chap, so you’d best watch your back.”

“All I’m saying,” Ho Yin added, “is that you should be careful. It can be dangerous down there.”

“Got it,” Boyd said. “Safety is my middle name.”

As they drove away, Boyd watched as Ho Yin stood in the driveway, observing them cruise off into the distance like a mother hen. “Sheesh!” Reggie muttered as he maneuvered their large, black car down the twisting roads into the city. “He’s really being protective of you, old chum. You’d think there was danger lurking around every corner the way he talks.”

“Well, he’s quite convincing,” Boyd said.

“Eh, he’s mostly full of hot air,” Reggie added. “Sure, there’s a couple of really dangerous cats lurking down there, and that Mr. Fang fellow is one of them, but the way Ho Yin acts, you’d think they have nothing better to do than watch for you all day. That isn’t the case. As long as we’re not too daft, we’ll be fine.”

Ho Yin watched Reggie and Boyd drive off, out the front gate of the mansion, and when they were out of sight, he pulled a phone from his pocket and dialed a number. “It’s me,” he said. “They’re headed there now. Stay close.” He tucked the phone in his pocket and went back inside.

The streets from the Peak down towards the waters of Hong Kong harbor were magnificent, not only for the views they afforded as they drove into the city, but also for their lush greenery and hidden alcoves. All along the road, there were trees, shrubs, and bushes that looked like they’d creep out onto the road and take their space back from the concrete that had been laid over them if someone wasn’t careful. Breaking up the greenery were magnificent houses for the extremely wealthy, some out in the open for all to see, while others were hidden behind security gates that only seemed to deepen the mystery of what lay behind them.

Punctuating the view was the Hong Kong skyline, emerging in all its magnificent glory as evening fell. Buildings of all different shapes and sizes lay below them as they descended into the valleys of the city, each so crammed together that it looked as if there weren’t even roads between them. Some were huge, like Central Plaza, while others were just striking in their shape and design, like the Bank of China building, which was all angles and corners, or the Lippo

Building, a huge glass structure that, if one were to look at it in just the right way, they would see a pair of koala bears built into the side.

In between all of these massive buildings were hundreds of smaller ones. Some were boxy and bland, while others were as grand as the island that they sat upon with stately grace. Most of the buildings had office lights, creating a sea of bluish, white stars across the landscape. Yet those tiny universes were regularly interrupted by massive, well-lit structures that looked like they were straight out of a science fiction film.

As Boyd and Reggie rounded the corner, they could see the biggest building on the island, a massive beast, full of strange angles, tons of steel, and more glass than all the buildings it surrounded. It was lit up with a glare that was blinding as it casted jets of light and shadows over all the buildings around it, yet its structure had none of the flair of its companions. It was just a giant, steel and glass monstrosity.

"See that blight on the horizon?" Reggie said, pointing at the building as he drove down the road. "That's Fang Tower<sup>63</sup>. It's the newest building in Hong Kong and the biggest in the world. Guess who built it."

"Mr. Fang?" Boyd asked, staring at it.

"Bingo," Reggie said. "Everyone in Hong Kong hates it because of its Feng Shui. Have you ever heard of Feng Shui?"

"No," Boyd said. "Is that some kind of food?"

"No," Reggie said, rolling his eyes. "It's the Chinese art of spatial arrangement. Some people believe that if you arrange things a certain way, either inside your house or outside your house, then it will bring you good fortune or bad fortune, depending on the placement of your possessions. For instance, there are certain sections of your house for career and family and wealth, and if your furniture is arranged in the right way in those sections, then you may get lucky."

"So if I put my comic books neatly in the money section of my room, then I'll make money off of them?" Boyd asked.

"Close, but not quite," he said. "It's a little more complicated than that. If you put all of your comics in your wealth section, it might mean that you spend all of your money on comic books. However, it

could also mean that, perhaps in the future, you might make some money from comics. It just depends.”

“Are you sure this isn’t just a ruse to get me to clean my room?” Boyd asked.

“If it is, then the Chinese have been practicing it for thousands of years, so it must be pretty elaborate,” Reggie chuckled. “Anyway, Fang Tower has really bad Feng Shui.”

When they arrived downtown, there were neon signs in all directions, lighting up the streets like it was daytime. It was everything that Boyd had ever wanted to experience: being in a foreign city under these extraordinary circumstances; seeing so many people with unique faces and clothing; absorbing all the sights, sounds, and smells of a new place, with a hint of adventure lurking behind it all. This was so much more than Frankfurter, a place whose main neon sign was the bright orange “M” of the local McDougal’s<sup>64</sup> restaurant. In Hong Kong, there were many tall buildings, all of them unique and brimming with life, while in Frankfurter, the tallest building wasn’t a building at all, but a large, robin’s egg blue, water tower that said, *Frankfurter, Home of the World’s Largest Hay Bale*<sup>65</sup>.

Hong Kong filled him with joy, even if it was a joy that produced a temporary amnesia, for in those moments Boyd forgot about the precarious situation that was his life. Riding through the streets of Hong Kong, it was easy to forget that everything had changed so dramatically and his parent had been kidnapped.

“Do you have parents, Reggie?” he asked as they cruised down the highway, into the tunnel that ran beneath the harbor.

“Yes,” Reggie said. “But I don’t really speak to them anymore.” Reggie stared at the road ahead, lost in thought for a few seconds. “They didn’t really take to my coming into the human world like I did. They thought humans were foolish and dangerous. Of course, they were right, but that doesn’t matter. They wanted me to stay and live in the mountains forever, just like they did. But I couldn’t do it. I had to see the world.”

As they cruised through the tunnel under Hong Kong harbor, Reggie’s words sank into Boyd’s head. Though they were spoken by an



eight-foot tall yeti, they still had the same effect. He'd been so worried about how he felt as his parents fought, he was unable to think about how they had to have felt. Was it lonely for his father to sleep on the couch night after night? His parents had spent so many years together, so was fighting between the two of them like being betrayed by your best friend? When Boyd had troubles, he sometimes went to his mother or father to talk about it and occasionally have a good cry. Who did his mother go to to console herself? And what about his father?

He didn't know the answer to these questions, but it did make him determined to give his parents a second chance. If he ever saw them again, he was going to be a better son. The only problem was finding them.

